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THE ROLE OF AFRICAN STATISTICAL SERVICES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LAGOS PLAN OF ACTION

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. This document serves as an introduction to three other documents which have been prepared for discussion under agenda item 13, entitled "The Role of African Statistical Services in the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action". The three documents are: The place of statistical information in the national information system (E/ECA/PSD.4/16); A review of statistical organization and staffing problems in Africa, including an assessment of the effectiveness of national statistical services (E/ECA/PSD.4/17); and The establishment of an African list of statistical priorities (E/ECA/PSD.4/18). Some of the ideas put forward in the three documents are summarized below.

2. The Lagos Plan of Action was, it will be recalled, inspired by a fundamental observation which can be summed up as follows: despite the development efforts made in Africa over the last 20 years, backed by the massive technical and other forms of assistance provided by bilateral and multilateral organizations, the African continent remains the poorest of all the regions of the world in terms of economic, social and cultural development, despite the recognized abundance of its natural - forest, mineral and other - resources.

3. The Lagos Plan of Action was designed to provide a general framework for the African countries and their partners in the field of co-operation for development. The adapatation and implementation of the Plan should enable the African region to remedy the persistent and harmful imbalances which are apparent in a number of sectors, especially in: (i) agricultural and industrial development, (ii) rural and urban development; (iii) techniques and productivity levels in the modern, informal and subsistence sectors; (iv) adoption of capital - energy - and import - intensive technologies - in the industrialization of areas where they were not necessary; (v) excessive development of cities, (vi) continued dependence on external economic relations to sustain internal growth and the increasing level of external debt and balance of payments deficits, etc.

4. The first thing the African countries are expected to do is to take all these factors into consideration in formulating their national economic and social development plans, and in seeking various means of eliminating the imbalances mentioned above, taking into account the conditions prevailing in each country. The second thing would be to monitor and supervise the implementation of these national plans, once they have been adopted, on the basis of sound statistical data on each principal sector of their national economies.

II. IMPORTANCE OF STATISTICAL INFORMATION IN THE IMPLEMENTATION, REVIEW AND MONITORING OF THE LAGOS PLAN OF ACTION

5. The review and monitoring of a plan has a two-fold objective, namely, to provide (i) information on the progress made and the inadequacies noted in the execution of the plan, including explanations of their causes, so that appropriate remedial measures can be taken to remove shortcomings; and (ii) a feedback mechanism linked with the planning of the next phase of the plan. The review and monitoring of the plan are usually performed by all the departments with responsibilities for economic development and growth are generally co-ordinated by the central planning department. This task is carried out in conformity with the aims and objectives spelt out in the plan and the measures designed to achieve them.

6. The adoption by many countries in the region of systematic economic and social development planning, in accordance with the general framework of the Lagos Plan of Action, is contributing to a considerable increase in the demand for socio-economic statistics. Appropriate information flows therefore need to be established which will make it possible not only to review the present status of a number of economic, social and demographic phenomena and the relationships between them, but also to study the trends and changes affecting these relationships over time. The availability of such statistical information, in sufficient detail and disaggregated by region, by sector and to meet the needs of special groups, will make it possible to design and monitor policies and programmes relating to fundamental issues of economic development and growth, such as poverty, unemployment, health, nutrition, illiteracy, migration and industrialization. Particularly necessary are data which can be used to define, assess and analyse development efforts.

7. In this connection, statistical data are principally required on:

- Agricultural production, livestock and fisheries;
- Size and structure of total population and active population;
- Industrial development;
- Resources and activities in the field of transport;
- Supply of and demand for goods and services;
- Volume and structure of external trade, finance and prices;

- Renewable and non-renewable sources of energy;
- The household sector, including income;
- Consumption and accumulation;
- Derived statistics (national accounts and balance of payments, other accounting matrices, etc.);
- The situation in respect of education, health, housing, leisure, etc;
- anpower (employment, unemployment, underemployment);
- Human resources;
- Social conditions, especially those of women, children, youths, the aged and the handicapped;
- The natural environment (air, land/soil, water), human settlements, natural disasters and pollution;
- Natural resources;
- Science and technology; and
- Tourism.

These data provide information on the resources available for production, their use and growth, population growth and the level of well-being.

8. Data on agriculture, livestock and fisheries no doubt constitute the first-priority information when economic and social development plans are being drown up, in most African countries, because more than 50 per cent of the active population is employed in this sector. It should be borne in mind that agriculture, livestock and fisheries supply the raw materials for industrialization. Thus, the statistical data to be collected in these sectors should make it possible to undertake a thorough study of production, and to link it in such a way to industrial development that the latter does not lead to further dependence of the African countries on the industrialized world.

9. Population data rank second among the types of information that are essential for the formulation of economic and social development plans. It cannot be over-emphasized that demography cannot be divorced from development, since man is the ultimate objective of all development. The preparation of population policies, and of a realistic plan within the general framework of the Lagos Plan of Action, must take full cognizance of demographic data and their trends. Population size,

structure, growth and distribution are of paramount importance because there is no vital sector in the life of a country that is not related to them. They make it possible, among other things, to determine the demand for goods, to undertake serious projections and demographic studies, to assess the number of jobs to be created, etc.

10. Formally, industry is the dynamic factor in the growth which is indispensable for development, because the expansion of industrial production is a pre-requisite for improving the balance of trade, increasing incomes and creating jobs. Technology is the cornerstone of industrial development; thus constitutes a field in which the inequality between developed and the developing countries is at its most flagrant. Not only do the developed countries possess technologies which the developing countries lack, but they are also considerably ahead of them in terms of technical know-how on account of their vast research and development activities and the rules governing the transfer of know-how. In order to draw up industrial development plans, and to monitor and assess the progress made by the African countries in conformity with the guidelines and principles land down within the general framework of the Lagos Plan of Action, statistics need to be available on, inter alia, the situation and evolution of the following elements:

- Characteristics of industrial establishments;
- Employment and salaries;
- Supply of industrial products;
- Goods and services used;
- Gross fixed capital formation
- Stock levels, etc.

11. Transport and communications also feature among the priority sectors in the Lagos Plan of Action. Various actions specified in the Plan, must be borne in mind by African leaders in formulating national development plans. These actions include:

(a) Promotion of integrated structures in the field of transport and communications in order to increase intra-African trade;

(b) Co-ordination among the different transport modes;

(c) Access to landlocked countries and isolated regions;

(d) Use of local material and human resources, standardization of networks and equipment;

(e) Promotion of African industry in the field of transport and communications equipment.

The implementation and evaluation of these measures require, inter alia, the availability of statistical data at national, subregional and regional levels on the status of the various forms of road, rail, sea and air transport, their use characteristics, traffic, cost of services, integration of transport in the economy, and postal, telephone and telegraph networks and traffic loads.

12. There is no need at this stage to enumerate all the actions envisaged in the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos, nor the statistical data needed to carry them out. Nothing more needs to be said than that the effective implementation of the recommendations in the Lagos Plan, through the different national economic and social development plans, depends inter alia on the availability in each country of the region of sound statistics on all key sectors of the national economy. For this objective to be achieved, it is important that each African country should have appropriate and effective mechanisms for the compilation, processing, evaluation, analysis and dissemination of data. In addition, these mechanisms should permit the establishment of close links between the compilers, analysts and users of the data. The national statistical services should therefore be well equipped and organized to discharge this important task of compilation, processing, and analysis of the data needed for the formulation, evaluation and monitoring of national economic and social development plans.

III. PRELIMINARY ARRANGEMENTS TO ENABLE THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SERVICES TO DISCHARGE FULLY THEIR ROLE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LAGOS PLAN OF ACTION

13. It should be recalled that the Council of Ministers of ECA, at its ninth session held in May 1983, adopted resolution 469 (XVII) on African statistical services, recommending measures to be taken to ensure the availability of adequate quantitative information at the national, subregional and regional levels to improve the design, planning, administration and analysis of economic and social policies in the context of the Lagos Plan of Action.

14. In keeping with the spirit of that resolution, the measures needed to ensure a rapid development of the (NSS) National Statistical Services can be classified into three with a matching assignment of responsibilities: the Government; the National Statistical Services and, lastly, intergovernmental institutions and bilateral and multilateral aid agencies. It should however be pointed out that the

situation differs from country to country and that the measures to be taken in each country should reflect its local conditions.

15. The Government, first of all, should place greater emphasis on the end product of statistical activities, i.e. the use of data for planning, administration and research purposes. Major efforts should be directed towards the specific identification of statistical data required for economic and social policy formulation, implementation and monitoring. This first task will considerably facilitate the determination of the type of analysis to be undertaken and the subsequent operations required to compile and process the data. Interaction between data supply and demand should be maintained because new applications crop up when new data become available, but a conscious effort to identify these applications could help to speed up the generation of data.

16. Statistical services need a sufficient number of qualified staff if they are to perform their functions satisfactorily. In this connection, progress is being made through the implementation of the Statistical Training Programme for Africa (STPA), the main objective of which is to enable the African region to become self-sufficient in terms of qualified statistical personnel. However, training alone is not enough, and African Governments should provide appropriate working conditions to motivate and retain the statisticians trained.

17. In order to place statistical activities in their proper perspective and define priorities clearly, countries should draw up plans for the development of statistics and integrate them in their overall national development plans. This is one of the key recommendations in the Lagos Plan of Action, and has implications for local funding of national statistical activities. Such statistical development plans must spell out the objectives to be attained during the time frame of the national development plan. They should be supported by an annual or biennial work programme indicating for each programme element the results expected and the financial resources required. This last point is of capital importance, given the fact that several national statistical services regard the lack of financial resources as one of the major obstacles to the development of statistics in their countries.

18. A work programme of this kind should also provide an opportunity to monitor the results obtained by the national statistical services. It should be borne in mind, moreover,

that the regular secondment of statisticians to the major ministries/departments is definitely conducive to the development of statistics at the national level, provided good technical co-operation is maintained between the statisticians attached to the different ministries and those at the central national statistical services.

19. In those countries where it does not exist, the Governments should enact legislation on statistics, which should not seek to address the short-term aspects of the strategy on statistics, but should focus on long term measures such as the authorisation to collect statistics and various items of information, together with the corresponding penalties and safeguards.

20. To ensure an optimal use of data, the government planning organs and those responsible for the study of specific sectors should be induced to adopt a more systematic and scientific approach which will also make it possible to overcome the difficulties arising from the pragmatic, case-oriented planning methods hitherto employed by many countries of the region.

21. The establishment of a national statistical committee, under the chairmanship of the minister responsible for statistics and comprising those in charge of the relevant ministerial departments, helps to strengthen and improve the national statistical system. One of the first tasks of such a committee is to plan and co-ordinate statistical activities at the national level and to draw up realistic and integrated programme for the development of statistics in accordance with the recommendations of the Lagos Plan of Action. The committee should at the same time strive to improve the day-to-day relationship between the national statistical services, the other producers, and the users of data. It could also prove useful to establish a data producers/users committee. Such committees should serve as a forum for the discussions aimed at harmonizing the concepts, definitions and classifications to be used in the country, in the light of international recommendations and with due regard for local conditions.

22. Finally, African Governments should take urgent steps to remove the difficulties resulting from the bottleneck in data processing which presently exists in many countries. Although some of the countries of the region have adopted a centralized data processing system, the national statistical services should have their own facilities, particularly at a time when data processing has made great strides through the introduction of inexpensive micro-computers with relatively high memory capacity. In any case, the staff of the national statistical services should be able to participate directly in data processing if the data are to be provided in a regular and timely manner.

23. The national statistical services should ensure that their inputs to the formulation, planning, administration and analysis of economic and social policies, and hence to the implementation, monitoring and review of the Lagos Plan of Action, are assessed at their true worth.

24. To this end, the national statistical services should first of all improve their internal management by seeking to achieve better results with existing resources. Accordingly, steps should be taken to ensure that publications appear regularly and on time, that the results of censuses and surveys are brough out as rapidly as possible and are disseminated to users, that the national statistical services take a much closer interest than in the past in the analysis and use of data so that users' real needs can be taken into account when establishing statistical priorities, etc. The national statistical services will thereby gradually win the confidence of those who have the final say on economic and social policies, and who will not fail to call on their services each time the need arises, and to allocate more resources to them.

25. Once the statistical priorities have been determined, either through the national statistical committee or through the producer/user committee, the national statistical services should seek to allocate responsibilities between the various existing sections, in such a way as to ensure that the sectors which have come to have priority, such as energy statistics and environmental statistics, are not forgotten. The structures of these sectors could, if necessary, be revised to reflect new developments brough about by the world economic crisis and by the drought and other natural disasters which have aflicted the African region in the last few years.

26. To enable the national statistical services to cope with the increasing demand for data for purposes of formulating policies and programmes and monitoring and evaluating economic and social development plans, they should be provided with their own permanent structures for data compilation at the field level. According to the survey on statistical organization and staffing problems in Africa, whose findings are reported in document E/ECA/PSD.4/17, less than half of the countries which participated have set up field survey structures. It is hoped that more countries in the region will be able to establish such structures with the assistance of the African Household Survey Capability Programme (AFSCP), which, coupled with data from other sources, ensures the existence of a regular flow of integrated and up-to-date socio-economic data.

27. Another significant source of information which national statistical services should not overlook is embodied in the administrative files kept by various ministries and public institutions. A number of these already have their own statistics units responsible for compiling, utilizing and disseminating statistics relevant to their work. However, it has been noted that these units are understaffed. Hence, the support of national statistical services is needed not only to provide supervision, notably in the harmonization of concepts, definitions and classifications, but also in ensuring the successful completion of assignments. In Ministries without such statistical committees, arrangements could be made to enable the national statistical services to use the statistical byproducts of their activities.

28. As stated earlier, data processing sometimes constitutes a bottleneck which prevents the national statistical services from furnishing statistical information to users at the right time. In addition to the measures Governments should take to provide national statistical services with appropriate technical materials, the latter should address themselves to the training of their professional staff in programming and analysis. This will enable the statisticians gradually to assume responsibility for the computer processing of their work and to resolve the problems encountered in this respect in the past.

29. Mention has also been made of the need to set up a national committee responsible for planning and co-ordinating statistical activities at the national level, and possibly a producers/users committee to facilitate the determination of statistical priorities. Such committees are not generally likely to be successful unless they are supported by the national statistical services, which should act as their moving spirit and driving force.

30. The intergovernmental institutions and bilateral and multilateral aid agencies which provide the countries of the region with technical and financial assistance in their statistical development efforts, should adopt an integrated approach to assistance, rather than deal separately with the various disciplines, for example the particular problems posed by prices, national accounts, etc. co-ordination among the institutions should therefore be further improved upon. It should be noted that mult-disciplinary programmes like AFRO and rural development data constitute another significant integrating factor.

31. Recommendations made at the international level on the subject of statistics should extend beyond the compilation, processing and tabulation of data to include also the analysis at co-ordination should likewise be made by the organizations so that they can be of as much assistance as possible to the developing countries in this field.

IV. CONCLUSION

32. As is apparent, the national statistical services of the African region have a paramount role to play in following up and monitoring the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action through the different national economic and social development plans. The goals set in the development plans can only be fully achieved if sound statistical data are available to the countries to enable them to analyse, review and monitor these plans with a view to making necessary adjustments. Concerted efforts by Governments, the national statistical services, intergovernmental institutions, and bilateral and multilateral aid agencies are required to enable the statistical services to serve their purpose effectively.

33. It must be borne in mind that the measures highlighted in this document are indicative and by no means exhaustive. An ongoing dialogue needs to be established in the African region between the producers and the users of statistics if a satisfactory solution is to be found to all the problems arising with regard to the data required to monitor and review the Lagos Plan of Action.

34. The Joint Conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Demographers is invited to:

(i) Exchange views on the place of statistical information in the national information system (E/ECA/PSD.4/16);

(ii) Formulate comments and suggestions on the results of the regional review of statistical organization and staffing problems in Africa carried out by ECA in 1985 (E/ECA/PSD.4/17);

(iii) Formulate comments and suggestions on the proposed new African list of statistical priorities in paragraph 21 of document E/ECA/PSD.4/16 and on the criteria for determining such priorities;

(iv) Consider, in the light of the proposals made in the four documents, the role of national statistical services in the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action and the measures which should be taken to enable them to fulfil this role effectively.